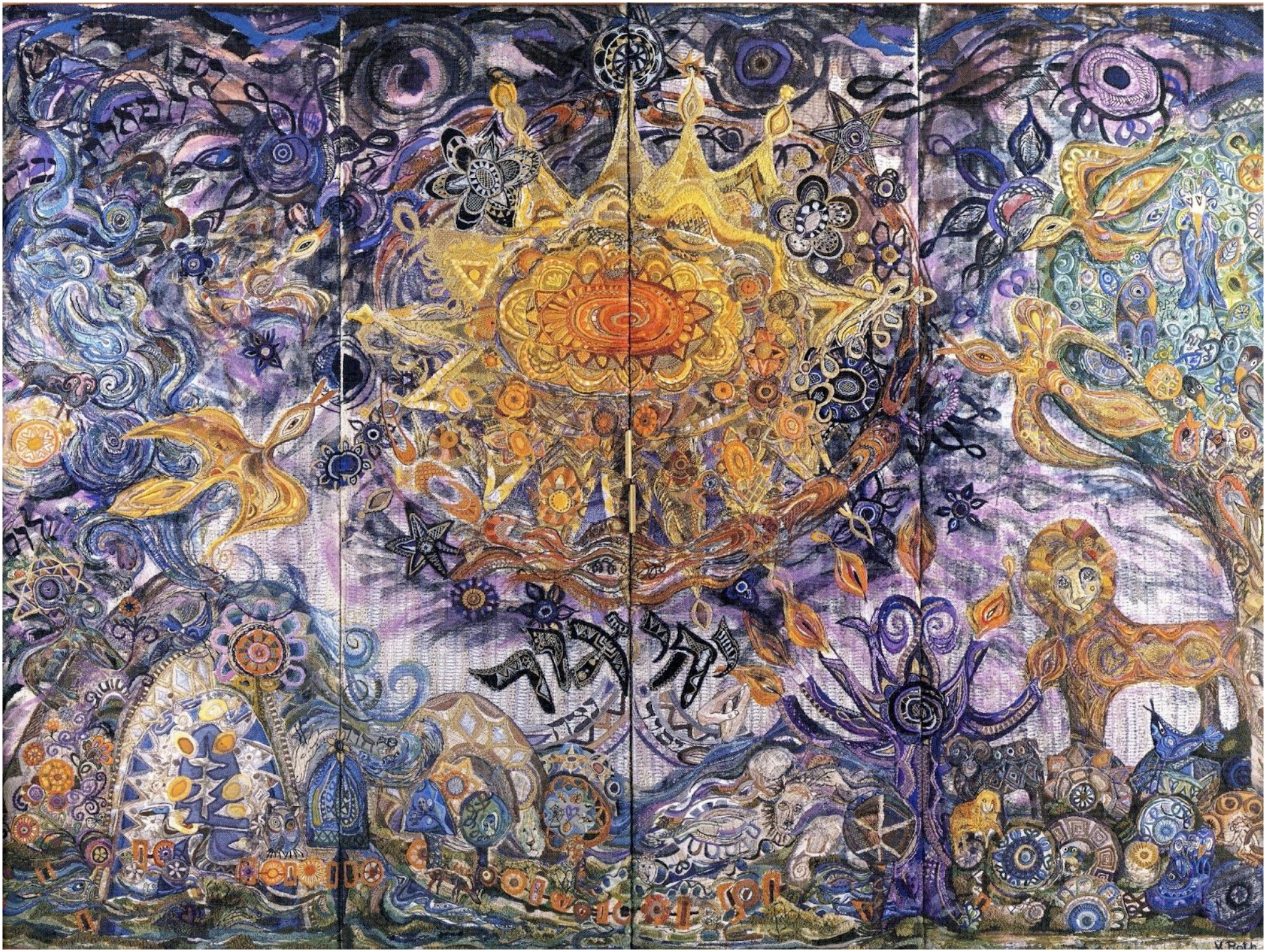
THE TEMPLE SINAI ARK TAPESTRY

A Masterwork of American Jewish Folk Art



This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of

Estelle C. Borowitz, 1925-2004

— a beautiful human being in every way —

by her immediate family,

Eugene B. Borowitz,

Lisa Borowitz, Drucy Borowitz and Philip Glick, Nan and Andrew Langowitz.

THE TEMPLE SINAI ARK TAPESTRY

A Masterwork of American Jewish Folk Art

By

Eugene B. Borowitz

Beth Levine

with

Judith Katz

Laura Kruger

TEMPLE SINAI
458 Lakeside Drive
Stamford, CT 06903
www.templesinaistamford.org

Copyright © 2006 Temple Sinai, Stamford, Connecticut

This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or any information storage and retrieval system now known or hereafter invented, without written permission from the publisher.

ISBN: 1-4276-0165-8

Eugene B. Borowitz, a member of Temple Sinai, Stamford, Connecticut, conceived the idea for this book and has guided its publication. He is Distinguished University Professor at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He has been awarded the Eisendrath Bearer of Light Award by the Union for Reform Judaism, and the Jewish Cultural Achievement Award by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. eborowitz@huc.edu

Beth Levine, a Temple Sinai congregant, is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in such national publications as *Good Housekeeping, Woman's Day, Family Circle, Readers Digest* and *Self*, among others. She also is the author of two parenting books and lectures frequently on the art of writing and publishing. www.bethlevine.net

Judith Katz and her family have been members of Temple Sinai for 27 years. After earning a Doctorate in Education from Columbia University's Teachers College, she taught at a local elementary school for many years. tokatz@sbcglobal.net

Laura Kruger is Curator of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum, New York, and is a specialist in contemporary fine art. lkruger@aol.com

Book production by Marcia Miller / Ink Direct, a widely-recognized authority of full-service print production management from concept advisement through fulfillment for cost-effective quality manufacturing, mailing, fulfillment services as well as a mentor for these disciplines. www.inkdirect.net

Book design by Karen Weinstein / designs4response. Karen creates award-winning direct marketiing and promotion design for Fortune 500 companies and lectures on direct response design to corporations and universities. Karen's textile designs are part of the Permanent Collection/FIT/SUNY. kweinstein@designs4response.com

Tapestry photograph copyright © Allison Chipak. Allison has been photographing art for the past eight years. Her work has appeared in magazines, catalogs and art books. She, along with partner Megan Murphy, founded Still Photography in New York City. achipak@earthlink.net

Portrait photographs of Phyllis Peckar Clamage, Veronica Roth and Florence Faerman Suerig by copyright © 2006 John Martin. John received his first camera in 1973 from his parents and been taking photos ever since. He learned how to print black-and-white photos at Veronica Roth's house 30 years ago, and is delighted to be able to take her portrait for this project. Tuttlestudio@aol.com

All photographs taken of the tapestry in progress copyright © 1972 Jack Alexander, former president of Temple Sinai. jackalex@optonline.net

Photo of Lucille Janis Weener copyright © 2006 Muralidhar Rao. murali.mangu@verizonbusiness.com

Printed by TanaSeybert, 525 West 52nd Street, New York, NY 10019

This book may be ordered from Temple Sinai, 458 Lakeside Drive, Stamford CT 06903
203-322-1649 / www.templesinaistamford.org

CONTENTS

"IN THE BEGINNING..."

BY BETH LEVINE

It was an ordinary Shabbat evening in 1969. Lost in thought, Temple Sinai congregant Lucille Janis gazed upon the white drapes that hung in front of the ark, and wondered, "Why is our ark covered with a shower curtain?" Little did she know that such simple musings were to lead her from that Shabbat service to five years of intense creative work, deep friendship with three other women — Phyllis Peckar Clamage, Veronica Roth and Florence Faerman Suerig — and result in a stunning work of Jewish folk art. (Eventually, a fifth woman, Ida Janis, Lucille Janis Weener's mother-in-law, joined the group as a stitcher.)

The tapestry that now covers the ark at Temple Sinai depicts Genesis, the creation of the world. This is the story of the creation of that Creation.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: At the same time that I noticed the ark's white drapes, I was reading a book called *Life Is With People,* by Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, a history of Jewish *shtetl* life. It noted how Jews in the *shtetl* were actually a migrant people who were forced out of town from time to time. They could not build fancy synagogues. Any artistry among the people was put around the Torah. I thought about the many women in the temple who did needlework and wondered why we couldn't put our talents together to take down that white curtain and put our artistry around the Torah. But where does one begin? I knew how to use a needle but I had no artistic talent.

I called my friend Marthe Clamage, who taught art at Stamford High School, and asked her if she had an idea and could then draw me a picture to follow. That very night during dinner, I picked up the phone to hear Marthe say, "I see it first as darkness and the Lord said, *Let there be light.*" I said, "What are you talking about?" She said, "Your picture, Genesis. The fish of the sea, the birds of the air. That's it." What she drew, artists call a cartoon. It was about 11" x 14" and showed a ball of sun, the tree of life, water and fish on the bottom.

I then told my story to the temple's rabbi, Samuel Silver. He liked the idea, but warned me that pursuing it would involve dealing with temple committees and the Board of Trustees. However, the temple's President, Jack Alexander, was very supportive. I am grateful to him.

So what do you do with a cartoon? You can't thread a needle from that either. I told my story to a secretary at the temple, Miriam Weissman. She told me about a Stamford woman named Veronica Roth, a Jewish artist who had come from Hungary during the 1956 Revolution. Miriam said Veronica had a background in Hungarian embroidery and had created award-winning tapestries. I called Veronica and took the cartoon to her. I told her what I wanted and asked if she could help us bring this design to life. It was a bit nervy of me because there would be no money involved.

VERONICA ROTH: At first, I said yes just for the challenge. The project scared me for a long time. How do you have the audacity to put a cover over the Torah? Then I realized that I did it because I had lost my family in the Holocaust:

My mother and grandmother had lived serving their families. My grandfather was an Orthodox Jew, and I would stand beside him as he recited his prayers. He went to *shul* every Shabbat and that had to be honored. I realized I had to speak for them; I felt their spirit.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: I was so excited when Veronica agreed to join. Veronica was the genius behind it all because she put Genesis together. Her first instruction was for me to attend a class in stitchery that she taught at adult education at Rippowam High School. There, she taught me to use my spirit to take every orange and gold and red thread I could find and make a sun. That became the basis for the centerpiece of the tapestry. I never thought of myself as creative, but Veronica showed me the way.

I knew this project would need more than Veronica and me so I used that class to look for more stitchers. That is where I found Phyllis Peckar. When I approached her about the project, she said, "Yes, I will do it. I am a member of Temple Sinai and I want to do something with my hands."

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: I was thrilled to be included. The women in my family were always doing work with embroidery, knitting and crochet. I had already been to art school and was in the midst of setting up my own studio. My good friend Florence Faerman, who was also a friend of Lucille's, was an artist and a Temple member, so she was invited to join the group as well. We all decided to commit ourselves to this, for however long it took.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: So we began. Jack Alexander asked what we would need. I thought the fabric and threads would cost about $500, and he said, "You got it." It took five years in Veronica's house, with our brown bag lunches. The kids went to school and we sewed. It was in four parts; Veronica was the one who figured out how to make the fabric fit the doors.

FLORENCE FAERMAN SUERIG: First we had to have a cloth that was perfect for the tapestry. We asked Klara Cherepov, a master weaver who lived in Greenwich, if she could create something.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: I had no idea how she was going to weave it and was a little bit concerned about the fact that there were openings in the weave. It was not an even weave. I was going to stretch the fabric because I was accustomed to stretching canvas on artist's stretchers. But I realized that there was a lot of play in the warp and the woof. I was concerned that there be enough body for us to stitch onto the fabric. Very often when we would stitch, the tautness of the background would make the stitches appear and disappear. We would have to go over it, or rip it out and do it in a different direction.

FLORENCE FAERMAN SUERIG: It would be hard to pick out who did what. The design was originally Veronica's. She would sketch on a piece of cloth and draw on it with a magic marker as our guide. She made a circle for the sun and then we were allowed to stitch any stitch we wished to use. We had artistic license within her framework. She gave us the yarn and the colors to use for each part. The stitches were our choice. That's what kept me intrigued, because no one was saying here, now do the running stitch, or weave here. You became part of the piece. It was not just something that someone had you do. So it's more than just a craft project. It's an art piece with people's souls in it.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: We started off working one day a week at Veronica's. When we realized the scope of what we were doing, we realized that one day was not enough. We went to two days a week. As it began to come together, we realized what we had, what was happening, and we upped it to three and four days a week.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: As we spent so much time together stitching, talking and sharing our lives, close friendships developed. We saw each other through so much: Marthe Clamage, who envisioned Genesis, died — too young. Phyllis Peckar became divorced, and eventually married Allan Clamage. Florence divorced, remarried, and then lost a child. I lost a young husband. We were like family, sewing together and sharing our lives. My mother-in-law, Ida Janis, also worked on it. Although I have been away from Stamford these many years, my heart is in that temple and that tapestry in many ways.

Left: Veronica Roth contemplates stitches, yarns and colors.

Right: The creators shared an artistic vision; yet in this photo, of Lucille Janis Weener, Phyllis Peckar Clamage and Veronica Roth, each appears to be alone in her own creative world.

PAM JANIS, DAUGHTER OF LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: My mother showed me simple stitches and then let me put several in place in small sections. (And to her credit, I don't think she ripped them out and redid them when I was asleep.) She seemed genuinely happy to have me participate. There's a small section on the far right panel that has a miniscule bit of my work in it. If you zero in on the lion's eyes, that's where I left my mark. My friend Ellen also did a little bit. It was a high honor, and while I've never been as talented with a needle and thread as Mom, I'm so glad now that I have a stitch or nine on that tapestry that is a part of both Temple Sinai's and Jewish cultural history.

VERONICA ROTH: I cut, like Matisse, from my bags of fabrics and yarns. They call me a "painter in fabrics." I did not use paint — only veiling, used in ladies' millinery, silk organza. It gives different shading, by adding more layers. We layered the netting, like a painter builds up layers upon layers. And then you put shapes up and tack them down. I used a regular marking pen to show where each should go. People were horrified, but it did not show. One can get lost in the details, but I praise God in the details. We can know Him through His qualities. God's work moves, so I wanted movement throughout the piece. Your eyes move constantly — in and out among the details. Can you imagine the energy God sends down?

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: We started with the light. That was the biggest thing. It was tricky because the panel edge split it down the middle and we needed for it to join. The Hebrew letters were sketched for us by Rabbi Silver. We cut them out of cardboard and traced them onto the fabric.

VERONICA ROTH: We had fun with it as well. There is a bird whose face is modeled after Rabbi Silver's. He had this way of standing before he would talk. He looked like that! And the lion has the face of the Jewish comedian Myron Cohen. It is forbidden by Jewish law to have a real face of man, a graven image, so when we got to the day when God created man, we consulted with Rabbi Silver. He said it would be all right if we used a pair of hands in prayer to represent human creation.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: I did the praying hands. I drew them from my own. I knew how to shade the human figure from my painting background, so I shaded the hands with darker threads.

VERONICA ROTH: It is a mystical piece. It shows the wonder of the Creator and how He has designed everything. It shows what a puzzle life is — how everything fits. I tried to put in as many of God's creatures as I could.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: Many of the images in this curtain weren't in the original cartoon. They are from

Veronica's background in the iconography of Hungarian folk art. By the way, we've never been able to find that original cartoon.

PAM JANIS: Many of the parents I know today would never be able to pull off a feat like the Torah curtain because they'd let themselves be constantly interrupted and refocused by their children, haunted by torturous fears that they'd wreck the kid's self-esteem for life if they said, essentially, "I'm working, get lost." I don't think my mom ever actually said that but I don't recall any of her four children ever trying to pry her loose from her work. It was obvious she loved every minute of creating and crafting this glorious treasure, and we were proud of her for doing it.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: We would stand back from the tree and Veronica would say, "We should have the bird flying towards it," or "Move the fish to the bottom." Veronica might pick up some wool and say, "I see a sheep out of this wool." She would sketch it, and I would do the sheep. She had a wonderful eye. We did these small items away from the curtain, and then we would attach them, as appliqué. It was Veronica's idea to put lace netting over the work.

FLORENCE FAERMAN SUERIG: We sat together and worked on specific sections at a time. We worked on one panel at a time. I might start a part and then someone else might do something else to it. It wouldn't necessarily be one person who would do the whole thing. So, if anyone says they know exactly what they did, that's pretty amazing. It was a very organic experience.

Left: "Lucille was the one who ripped out stitches when we didn't like something. She had the patience."
--Veronica Roth

Middle: Phyllis Peckar Clamage shows the finely detailed work that was needed to create the tapestry.

Right: Veronica Roth studies her work.

PAULA EPPINGER, FORMER PRESIDENT OF SISTERHOOD: It was thrilling to watch this evolve. Various fabrics were appliquéd to a custom hand-woven background. Thousands of stitches; hundreds of types of yarns, threads and stitch combinations were locked into these panels to create this spectacular vision of Creation.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: After about three years, the big day came when the tapestry was put on wooden frames. When my family had to buy a new car, we bought a station wagon where the seat goes down so that it could hold the Torah curtain panels.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: Once in a while, toward the very end, when we wanted to finish more, we each would take one panel home and work on a certain section. We'd check it with Veronica as we went. We'd talk about what to do next and bring it back. And if it didn't blend in appropriately with the other sections, we'd rip it out and start again. We all respected that.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: Veronica was a taskmaster. She'd stand back and say, "Move that fish one inch." Well, a one-inch move might be one month of ripping! Recently, when Veronica and I were reminiscing, she said, "I remember us sewing and I remember you ripping. You had the patience." I worked carefully with a single-blade razor.

FLORENCE FAERMAN SUERIG: If Veronica didn't like something, out it came, and that was that.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: It wasn't always at Veronica's house. It was on my dining room table for about a year. I would often embroider the smaller pieces in our bedroom. My husband once said, "This is an admirable project, but last night I slept on a pin!"

Left: Lucille Janis Weener, pleased with the work.

Near right: Phyllis Peckar Clamage concentrating.

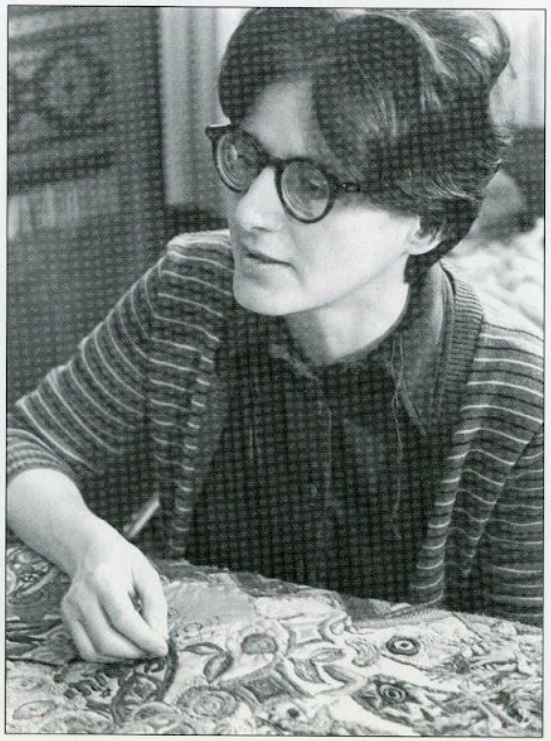
Middle right: Veronica Roth confers with Phyllis Peckar Clamage.

Far right: Veronica Roth, keeping watch on Creation.

PAM JANIS: Though my mom and friends worked on small sections at a time, they still needed to lay flat the larger panel that a section was on, and the only surface in our house big enough for that was the dining-room table. They worked on this project for so long, remember, so after a while I stopped thinking, "Oh, sure, everyone has a Torah curtain on their dining room table," and it just became another natural feature in the house topography. But certain rules had to be observed: 1) Absolutely no food or drink allowed anywhere near the dining room. Only in our house could that make sense. 2) Only adults were allowed to move the panels to somewhere else in the house when we needed the dining room for holiday meals. Thanksgiving, for instance, became one of the few events when Mom Moved The Torah Curtain, an event in itself. 3) No doing homework near the tapestry because homework usually involved writing implements.

PAULA EPPINGER: I remember hearing Lucille report on progress at Sisterhood meetings. When they completed a section to Veronica's satisfaction, there was great relief. But sometimes, Veronica would inspect the work and it would have to be redone — a different stitch, a change in fabric, a missed interpretation of instructions. Ripping became an art form. But finally the big moment came. The panels were completed.

JACK ALEXANDER, FORMER TEMPLE PRESIDENT: The installation was a problem because it was in four panels. How do you open it so that when it was closed, the four panels would be flush but when it was open, the two middle would slide behind the outside ones? A friend of mine was involved with the old Stamford Hartman Theater, and he got one of their stage technicians to figure out a way to do it. What he did was make a curved track for the inner panels to move on. When they were pulled manually,



they would first move back and then around behind the side panels. This worked okay, but I was never really happy with it. But when the temple had the tapestry repaired in 2004, they installed a new system, which works much better.

PAULA EPPINGER: I was there the day they were installing it. The man who was doing the installing said something to the effect of, "Gee, this panel rubs against that panel when we pull the cord. Let's just cut off these pieces that are in the way." Unfortunately, he was serious. Fortunately, we women were adamant that those gorgeous sunbeams stay intact.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER: The tapestry was dedicated on Chanukah, December 13, 1974. Rabbi Silver honored us. My husband died two years later, and I had some memories at his funeral when I looked at that tapestry, remembering the pins that bothered him.

The artists at work on different panels.

PAULA EPPINGER: *L'dor vador!* From generation to generation. Many years ago, women of three generations created this beauty. Today, our children and their children are moved by its beauty. Perhaps it will play a role in influencing them and future generations to revere the wonder of our world, to love beauty and to see beauty in all creatures.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE: Lucille was very artistic, although she didn't realize it, and very devoted, and that is a wonderful combination. Florence was an interior designer. At the time, she was designing handmade garments. Although I had gone to art school, my grandfather was a tailor who was involved with helping the ladies' garment workers get started. Veronica had this background in embroidery from Hungary. So it was an unusual combination of people who had manual dexterity and the will and the time. Weren't we lucky? I really feel this was a very blessed event. This has a sacredness, at least to me, and I was very proud to be able to work on it. It thrilled me to work on something that would last longer than I did.

VERONICA ROTH: This is a piece that comes from our hearts. We all felt this way — to honor the Torah. The true meaning of Creation came to me; how God balanced Creation. Mercy and goodness were one day, and the next day was judgment, like female and male parts — yin and yang. Every day was balanced by the next day. But up there He just is. We have to know Him by the forms and qualities in each little creation, and everything happens in perfection. At first you question and then you know.

I just realized that the Torah curtain is the prayer of the *Kaddish* in visual form. The glory of our faith is to give praise, to sanctify, to extol the greatness of our Creator in times of sorrow and joy. This prayer is also a testimony to the human soul, which cannot be defeated by evil and grief. May our prayer be acceptable to the One to whom it is dedicated.

Amen.

TOUR OF THE TAPESTRY

BY EUGENE B. BOROWITZ AND JUDITH KATZ

We expect a tapestry to be a wall hanging that can be best seen from some distance. Because of its size this partially holds true for the Temple Sinai ark doors tapestry. What distinguishes this extraordinary work of stitchery is that, though it dominates the ark wall, it is not meant to be merely an artistic wallhanging. Rather, in the classic terms of Jewish religious aesthetics, it is an artistic embellishment of the congregation's ritual life, glorifying the most holy spot in the synagogue, the repository of the temple's Torah scrolls. Every reading of the Torah involves the use of these magnificent doors. Those who have been given the honor of opening and closing them will be in intimate contact with the tapestry and its exuberant details.

Come take a tour of the tapestry from three perspectives: the long view, from the rear of the sanctuary; the midrange view, from the closest of the pews; and up close, particularly for the many (often humorous) tiny details that enliven the tapestry. This last perspective is not limited to those with a ritual invitation. When no service is in session, anyone may walk up to the ark to inspect the closed doors with their four panels of tapestry. And, while opinions differ as to the best time for making such a visit, we feel that a sunlit morning or afternoon best brings out the many colors and textures in this unique work of religious art.

THE LONG VIEW

Entering the sanctuary, our eyes are drawn to the *bimah*, the elevated dais before the ark wall. Our eyes are immediately attracted to the four vivid panels of tapestry – roughly ten feet wide and seven feet high — which dominate this sacred space. Specifically, we are drawn to a grand spectacle of orange and yellow from whose whirling vortex great points of energy or majesty radiate. We know immediately that we are at the heart of the Creation, what our generation has come to call the Big Bang. It appears to be pushing back and transforming a thin wave of dark material, the remnants of the chaos not yet transformed into the goodness of Creation. There are no straight lines; only curves, whorls, almost-things and creations we can recognize. It bespeaks energy in motion. Beneath this focal symbol, there appear six flying Hebrew letters, each one differently adorned, comprising God's two classic words climaxing the book of Genesis's account of the first day of Creation, *Y'hi Or*, "Let there be light."

This sense of the dividing light-energy transforming all about it heightens the contrast between the top and bottom of the tapestry. For all its agitated circularity, the material at the top of the tapestry is largely dark, interspersed with flashes of lighter material. The struggle with the *tohu vavohu*, "the void and unformed," is hinted at here whereas at the bottom of the doors, the greens and oranges indicate the further progress that Creation has made. Something similar is intimated by the difference between the left and the right panels of the tapestry. On the left, we see much blue, the rising of the swirling waters beginning to teem with life, but the right brings us to the dry land with a portion of a large tree and several outsized animals. As we will see, the path from left to right takes us on the seven-day journey of Creation.

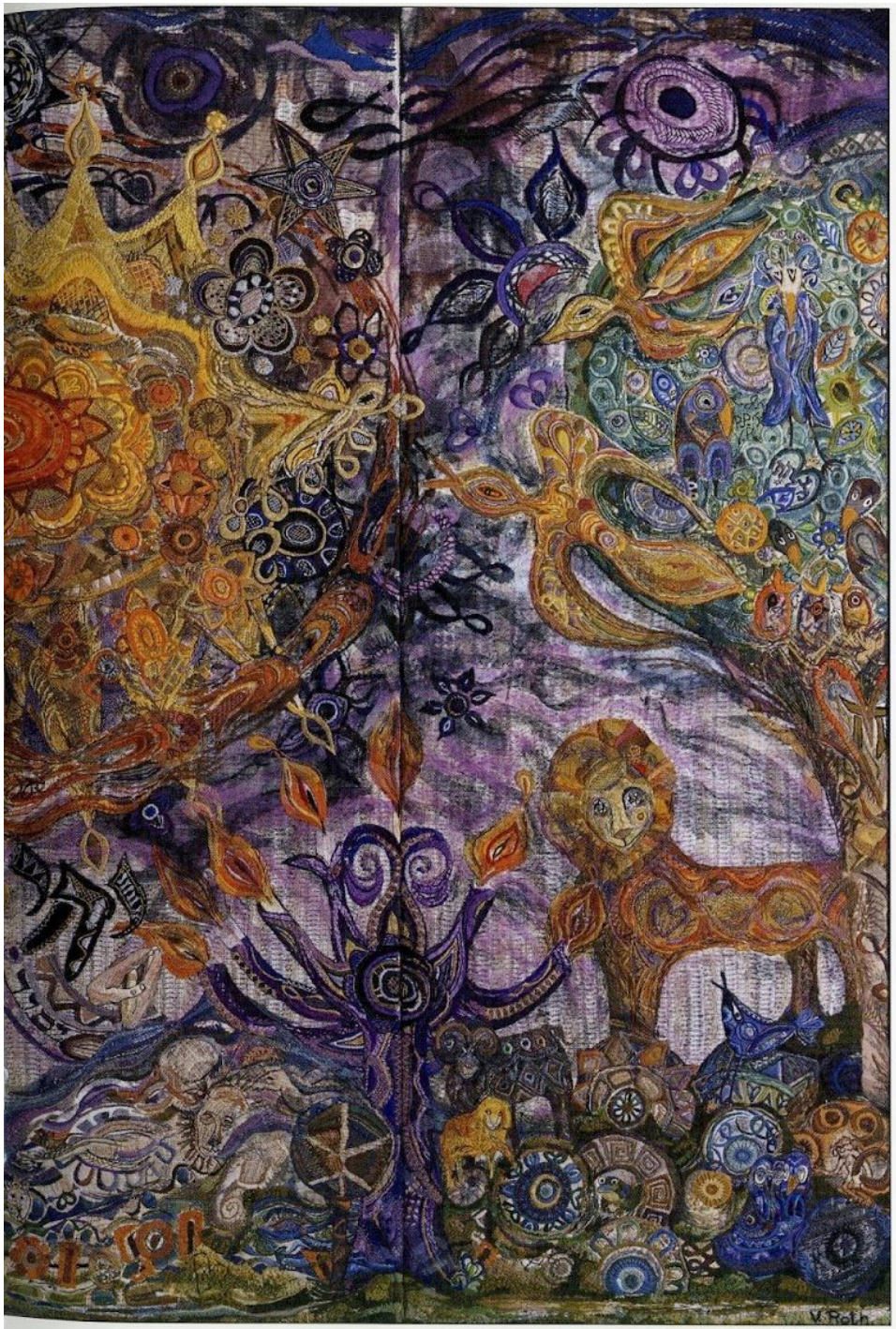
THE MIDRANGE VIEW

Move forward to the front pews. The figures in the tapestry become more apparent and the contrast between the extreme left and right panels heightens. On the left, motion is expressed, but there is only one animal, a lone bird in flight toward the creative center and perhaps one large, glorious flower climbing above what may be a mountain whose interior holds the promise of things not yet fully formed. By contrast, on the right, we see the tree in the background is teeming with life, with two large birds in flight, while a friendly lion stands beneath them. This lion, it should be noted, is quite different from the ones we customarily saw in synagogues years ago, generally sitting on their haunches, holding up tablets of the Ten Commandments and displaying their goodwill by showing us their red sequin tongues. The tapestry lion is simply standing there on all his paws, with his head tilted toward us in the friendliest possible manner. He is these artists' version of the Lion of Judah, an old symbol of the Jewish people, for he is situated near a seven-branched menorah — the one the Torah describes as being made for the tabernacle in the wilderness and thus the model for a later one in the Temple. The flames on the candles mimic the extensions of the crown-like points in the center of the work.

At the bottom of the tapestry we can now clearly see a set of orange figures, some circular, others vertical, undulating across the screens like a great serpent. In Panel 1 (we have numbered them from left to right), a serpent-like figure emerges from near the end of the train of orange figures. Is this, perhaps, a reference to Eve's evil companion in the Garden of Eden?

THE TAPESTRY UP CLOSE

(Ideally, we suggest taking a copy of this brochure with you when you come to Temple Sinai to explore the exquisite details of the ark door tapestry. Even after years of living



with it and studying it, we still discover items in it we had not previously noticed. In what follows, we do not claim to have pointed out all that the creative talent of the stitchers gave us, only a goodly number of their sometimes whimsical, sometimes sobering, often endearing figures, many of them quite tiny indeed. We shall proceed panel by panel, moving from the top to the bottom.)

Panel 1, far left

A swirl of blue and black is relieved by pink highlights, presenting us with an artistic sense of the Creation making something out of nothing. Amid this coming-to-be are a number of lopsided figure eights, loopy bowling pins as it were ***(see figure 1)***. Are these perhaps figure eights on their side, the mathematical notation for infinity, here in the process of becoming finite? At the panel's left floats the Hebrew letter *shin*, the same one inscribed on the outside of a mezuzah as a reminder of one of God's names, *Shaddai*. Below it fly three Hebrew words in black. These are Kabbalistic terms, specifically three of the ten attributes of God, according to Kabbalistic doctrine. Of these *s'firot* (literally "spheres", but better understood as nodes of God's being and functioning), the tapestry here mentions three: *Chesed* (Mercy), *Tiferet* (Glory) and *Gevurah* (Might).

Below the swirls at the right margin of this panel, there is the head of a yellow bird, the rest of whose body is not yet visible. Below it, before the large bird in flight, a small, four-pointed star also is struggling into full being. The large, clearly visible bird flies towards the center of the tapestry. Above and to the left of its topmost wing is a wooly-coated ram. Under the end of the bird's body, a teeny purple fish, one of the smallest figures in the tapestry, struggles against what may be a curling blue wave. To its left is the Hebrew word *shalom*. It is not one of the Kabbalistic *s'firot,* but its meaning, peace, has made it a central Jewish virtue. Is this, then, a description of Creation's ideal? It appears above a six-pointed star, the only classic Jewish symbol to appear in the tapestry.

Figure 1: The words Chesed, Tiferet and Gevurah swirl in the void.

All these figures are suspended over a mountain whose left side is full of flowers; between two orange flowers, a friendly donkey's head appears. We are given a cutaway vision of the inside of the mountain, with an owl perched at the right side of its base ***(see figure 2)***. Beneath it and to the left, there appears to be the emergence of a snake. This panel is quite a contrast to the much more fully-delineated creations of the rightmost one. but its mix of figures, things and symbols is a strong testament to the simultaneity of Creation.

Panels 2 and 3, center

The great orange and yellow creative center of the tapestry now can be seen in all its intricate, dynamic glory. There is hardly an area where there is simple color: Ellipses of pulsating variations color give way to what might be necklaces of small patches of yellow, only to be succeeded by a circumference of triangulated figures, which in turn give way to rounded yellow forms and then a thin dark perimeter. The whole then bursts out with a dynamic profusion of circular orange figures against a somewhat darker set of linear and uncertain webs ***(see figure 3)***. This explosion of creative energy climaxes in a series of yellow, triangular protuberances, with the four top ones, the two highest on the left and those on the right ending not in a point but in a rounded element. The grandest of these is the one at the center top of this dominant image. Breaking with the yellow of the other projections, it has a large gold-and-silver-filigreed diadem. The intimations of a crown are broken only by the circularity of the whole, with the completion of the "crown" broken by the obscuring of the bottom yellow-pointed rays on Panel 3.

The counterpoint to this grand central whirl of energy is a series of diverse starlike and circular figures, largely outlined

Figure 2: A mountain is abloom while an owl keeps watch.

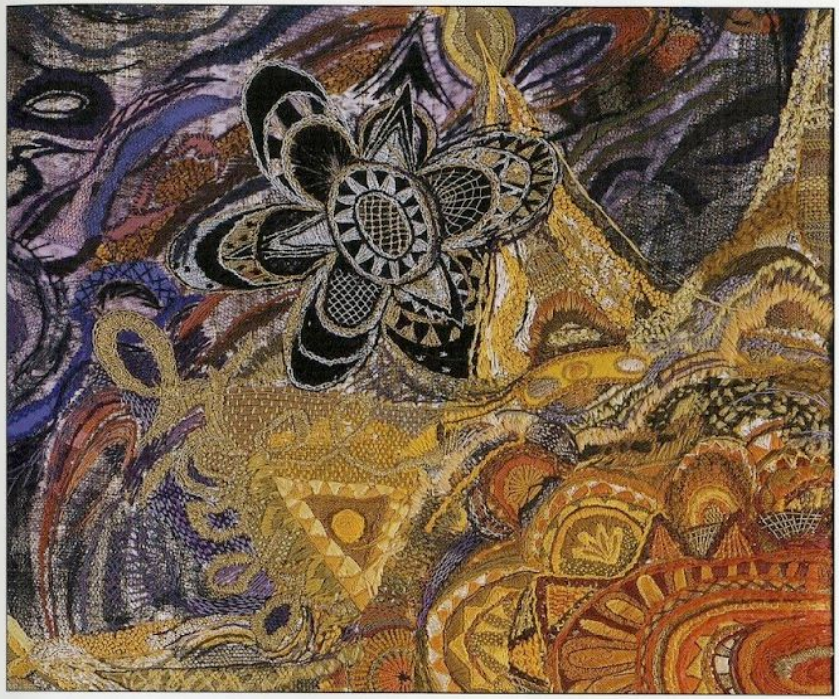


Figure 3: The void gives way to God's creation of light.

in dark colors but often decorated with unique silvery lineaments. Some clearly seem to be stars-in-the-making, others, nodes of evolving matter. Beneath this dominant vision, where the Hebrew words for "Let there be light" stand, there is a broad, crescent-shaped swath of light tan material, relieved by an occasional wash of pink or the protrusion of figures from below. It not only sets off the daring color and energy of the stitchery above it, but, also allows a glimpse of the special cloth woven for the tapestry that provides the foundation for the transforming artwork.

From below, several significant figures intrude upon the peace of this area. At the junction of Panels 2 and 3, two Hebrew words curve up and in to meet the bottom of the large Hebrew caption of the tapestry. They are, from right to left, two more of the ten *s'firot, Yesod* (Foundation) and *Netzach* (Eternity). Another *s'firah, Hod* (Majesty), which with these two forms the funnel to the bottommost *s'firah*, the point at which God "meets" with humankind, is inscribed at the left end of Panel 2 just above the blue, pointy miter-shaped object. To the right of the word *Yesod*, you will also see two human hands, folded as if in prayer ***(see figure 4)***. This is the only reference on the tapestry to the creation of humankind. Glorifying humanity in the synagogue has long been unacceptable to Judaism — but this brief reference to humankind what we modern Jews consider, with much of our tradition, the apex of the Creation — seemed quite acceptable. Besides, the tapestry itself is nothing if not a tribute to God's creating produced through human creativity.

Below, a rush of forms tumbles across the bottom of these panels. Some are clearly trees, flowers or animals ***(see figure 5)***; others are unidentifiable matter seeking a definitive form. Thus, near the word *Hod*, is it a bird, or is it a fish? Underneath is a tree with insects on its branch and another

Figure 4: The praying hands symbolize the creation of man.

with a cobweb. Just below it is the first of three lion faces, followed by a sadder one above the orange figures at Panel 3, and an apparently happier one farther along the rightward thrust of the creatures. Is that a primitive dinosaur-like form near this rightmost lion *(see figure 6)*? In any case, do not overlook the grazing deer apparently sipping from the stream underneath the orange figures at the bottom middle of Panel 2, and the teeny fish swimming in it in Panel 3.

Panel 4, far right

The light colors at the top of the panel signal the progress Creation is making. A pink disc flies off into the upper right corner on its way to specific being. Behind it, the loopy eights in various styles again signify infinity approaching finitude. Two birds with splendid plumage take wing toward the center, perhaps having just departed from the left part of a great green tree teeming with leaves, fruits and life-to-be.

Seven birds of differing sorts and sizes perch in the tree's

Figure 5: A forest full of creatures springs to life.

Figure 6: The face of the lion floats amid other new life.

verdant branches. The highest and tallest of these is an imposing figure in blue, purple and green, a bird with a marvelous pendulous head hanging forward to his chest. His searching eyes peer at us from the center of two vertical "V's." This impressive image, the artists told us, was an affectionate tribute to their congregation's spiritual leader, Rabbi Sam Silver, whose stance it mimicked. To the left of the base of the Rabbi Silver-bird are the initials of four stitchers of the tapestry (PC, LJ, FF and VR). MC for Marthe Clamage, who designed the original cartoon, appears a bit lower. In addition, a line goes from the Rabbi-bird to a heart in which *Malchut* (Majesty), another of the *s'firot*, is inscribed on two levels, perhaps to make room for a teeny Star of David to be included beneath it.

Farther down there is a family of birds comprising two

adults who sit somewhat higher in the tree than do their three open-billed young waiting in the nest to be fed. Is this perhaps a reminiscence of the temple congregation ***(see figure 7)***? The family group is situated above a heart. In the heart is the letter, *heb*, often used as substitute for the four-letter name of God, which out of reverence is never pronounced but for which we substitute the Hebrew word for one's liege lord, Adonai.

Underneath, sheltered by the tree, stands a particularly friendly lion. If we had any question that this King of Beasts is a symbol of the Jewish people (the "Lion of Judah"), it would be quickly answered by noting that, in a whimsical touch, the lion's pupils are diminutive Stars of David. This lion, according to the artists, is meant to be an image of friendliness, and was thus modeled on a beloved Jewish comedian of the time, Myron Cohen. The lion stands on a hillside, overlooking the right side of the menorah, while at his feet other creations peer from behind the colorful rocks. Among them we see a smiling ram and

Figure 7: A family of birds around the tapestry creators' signatures.

Figure 8: Animals take a peep at Veronica Roth's signature.

a golden ewe, while peeping out from behind a rock with a brown geometric perimeter is a most friendly teeny frog. Nothing seems to be too small to convey the very great goodness of Creation.

At the bottom right corner of the tapestry, in a place of honor, we see the name V. Roth ***(see figure 8)***. Veronica brought the tradition of Hungarian folk stitchery with her to America, and brought her artistry and achievement in needlework to the design originally sketched out by Marthe Clamage. Under Veronica's tutelage, that plan was radically filled out and transformed in ways that only a transcendent vision could validate — as the extraordinary beauty and accomplishment of the tapestry make plain. God bless her and her companion workers, and everyone who made this glorious work a constant inspiration to all who worship at Temple Sinai in Stamford, Connecticut.

ART OF THE TAPESTRY

BY LAURA KRUGER

An ancient sage once said that to create a garden is to search for a better world. Here in the sanctuary of Temple Sinai, of Stamford, Connecticut, a hidden garden flourishes, and suggests to the viewer that the treasure concealed behind this vibrant landscape is of the greatest value. Intricate, radiant and complex, the four hand-embroidered panels of the ark doors invite our close scrutiny and attention. The artists/craftspersons who designed and fabricated this masterpiece have combined sophisticated symbolic motifs with spontaneous, naïve imagery to express their personal, interpretive exuberance.

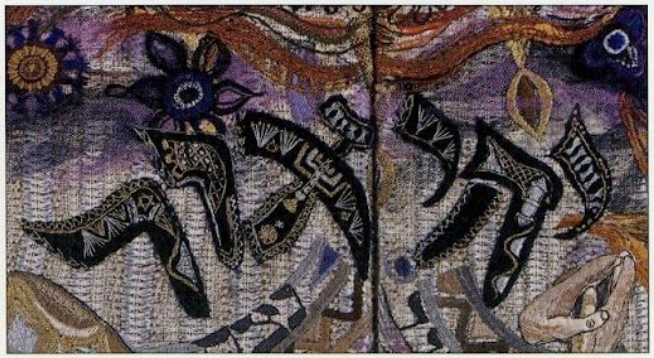
Numerous examples and types of textiles are used in Jewish rituals and ceremonies, with the highest quality and workmanship reserved for the Torah regalia. This is a category of fabrics called "objects that carry holiness": the *me'il*, or Torah mantle, the wimpel or binding wrappers for the Torah scrolls; the *parochet,* which is the curtain inside the Torah ark shielding the Torah scrolls; and the cover for the *bimah* lectern or reading desk. Each must be of the most sumptuous workmanship. These liturgical textiles evoke devoutness and lend magnificence to the religious ceremony. Historically, they were made of rich textiles donated by congregants, frequently lavish silk brocade wedding dresses or waistcoats, and were over-embroidered with symbols and text. During the 16th – 18th centuries master embroiderers and weavers in central Europe were predominantly men, with women in the synagogue responsible for the many domestic textiles used for *Shabbat* and the holidays. In the United States, beginning in the 1860s, with wave after wave of Jewish immigration, women joined together to create ladies' sewing societies. Domestic arts were acceptable outlets for the creative energy of women who otherwise were denied access to training or employment as artists, sculptors, or designers. As much social as artistic groups, these societies encouraged one another and filled their local sanctuaries with devotional embroideries. The enlightened amateur is often discounted as a source of visual enhancement for public spaces. It is assumed by many people that a "professional", a person who focuses on or devotes himself to special skills in a particular medium in exchange for recompense, has greater vision and technical expertise. Needlecraft belies this interpretation since numerous people learn their skills from childhood, develop a keen interest in comparative examples and think in terms of interpreting images through their vocabulary of stitches. Often in collaborations. enlightened needle-workers rose to the challenge of interpreting biblical symbolism in the style of their own times. Thus a genre of needlecraft developed in service of Jewish congregations.

Textile or fabric-covered Torah ark doors are uncommon, but not unknown. Since fabric is more delicate than wood or metal and requires mounting on a rigid surface, there are few brilliant examples in existence. The Baltimore Maryland Hebrew Congregation, its building designed in 1954 by the noted architect Percival Goodman, includes a needlepoint tapestry mounted on four sliding wooden panels forming the doors of the Torah ark. A collaboration of more than forty members of the congregation, supervised by the designer of the project, Mrs. Randolph Rothschild,

executed this magnificent work. Other Torah screens created during the period of the 1950s and 1960s include those at Temple Beth Am, Chicago, and Temple Shalom in Newton, Massachusetts. Needlecraft "guilds" flourished in the American, Canadian and Israeli Jewish communities in this period with museum and synagogue exhibitions inspiring emerging artists and encouraging innovative talents. The continuum of communal and collaborative efforts echoes the American tradition of quilting bees, and forges friendships, shared values and solidarity.

Beginning in the mid–1960s, the visual style known as "flower power" emerged in popular culture as a symbol of non-violent ideology. As a reaction to the Vietnam War and reflecting a heightened awareness of racial inequalities in society, students and young people turned away from a culture of confrontation and embraced peaceful protest. The press was filled with images of flower-bedecked teenagers putting blossoms inside the gun barrels of the police. An exuberant, decorated style emerged in which embroidered apparel, fantastical painted images and slogans, and draped floral garlands, reflected a personalized, noncommercial lifestyle. The fragility of the threatened environment, as well as the threatened survival of tribal, ethnic and marginalized peoples were important issues. Young Jews, rejecting the commercial and machine-made, turned to handcrafted ritual objects in an effort to personally connect with the deeper meaning of prayer and ritual. A revival of needlecraft consumed the general populace, served by easily available materials, instructions and workshops. Needlepoint, crewel embroidery, macramé, appliqué, crochet and weaving became popular as hobbies, and from that, as careers. The Torah ark of Temple Sinai in Stamford, Connecticut was created during this period of exuberant imagery. In a seeming freehand style of images, the Torah ark doors exude the optimism of the mid–1960s. Pattern upon pattern, image merging into image ***(see figure 9)***, a kaleidoscope of glowing color richly celebrates *hiddur mitzvah* to glorify God's commandments. This tapestry strongly bears the imprint of time and place and is a direct expression of stylistic and aesthetic values.

The Torah ark, as the receptacle of the sacred text of the Torah, is in itself a holy treasure. The Torah ark is not mentioned in the Bible, although many people, overwhelmed with the specific and intricate description of the Ark of the Covenant, believe them to be one and the same. The Ark of the Covenant is perhaps the most powerful symbol for the ancient Israelites. God speaks to Moses in Exodus 25:1–8, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." This statement is followed by the beginning of a long and specific description of the design, size, material and decoration for the protective container of the laws that God has just given to Moses. Exodus 25:16, "And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee." This phrase is repeated again in verses 21–22. The sheer power of this holy container for the Ten Commandments, evidence of God's covenant



Left - figure 9:
Exuberant images of Creation.

Right - figure 10:
"Let there be light."

with Israel, created its own aura. Repeatedly, the presence of the Ark of the Covenant is called upon, accompanying leaders and generals into battle, and, it is imbued with mysterious powers. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem where ultimately Solomon built a sumptuous Temple to house it. However, even before the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E., the Ark of the Covenant seems to have disappeared. The Jews, in a state of disbursement from Jerusalem, developed a symbolic replacement for the lost Holy Ark of the Covenant, and that has evolved through time to be the Torah ark that we still use. The Torah ark is regularly placed in such a way that the congregants, in facing the Holy Sanctuary, are facing Jerusalem. The word "ark" is an acrostic of the Hebrew *aron kodesh,* or "holy cabinet."

The four-panel sliding Torah ark doors at Temple Sinai are dense with symbolic images, some of which are traditional, although there are a few that are simply joyous additions to the Creation scene. The dominant inscription floating just beneath the central, blazing sun declares, "Let there be light" ***(see figure 10)***. Each of the letters is formed by bravura stitchery, surface stitches used in a free embroidery technique with various types of yarn to add physical and dramatic dimension to the work. Hands loosely clasped in prayerful attitude impart a consciousness of the unimageable Divinity behind this ultimate miracle. The dazzling blaze fills fully one quarter of the entire work ***(see figure 11)***; the corona of fourteen points of light are kindled in flame. The sun's fire mingles with the flames from the "Tree of Life" seven-branched menorah in the lower right corner. Taking shelter under the spreading arms of the candelabra are sheep, a ram, owls, birds, a snail, a sleeping lion, while a benign lion stands guard. The swirl of the firmament is layered with flying birds and flower/stars. Nesting in a fruitful tree to the right margin of the work is a family of young fledglings. On the far left, a ram floats above the word *shalom*, peace, which hovers over a six-pointed star within a star. Fish are flying in all directions, caught in waves, in comets, in flowers. Waves lap at the lower left edge but this moment is clearly the fifth day of Creation, Genesis 1:20–21: "God said, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.'" The upper left side bears the words *Chesed* (Charity), *Tiferet* (Glory) and *Gevurah* (Strength). They overlay a swirl of clouds, stars in turmoil and roiling darkness.

Although the work has never been given an official title, this is surely The Seven Days of Creation. The naiveté of floral designs in which no species is recognizable confers a childlike delight in playful invention. If there is a serpent coiled around the tree trunk, it is, at this moment, a joyful snake — certainly nothing to fear.

Shemesh, the sun, is the prime element of light and generative heat. Essentially white-hot in color, it appears to be red in the morning when its rays reflect the rose leaves of the Garden of Eden.

The ram is a potent symbol of Jewish religious tradition. Not only is the shofar, the ram's horn, used to call congregants to repentance at *Rosh Hashanah,* but as one of the primary sacrificial animals during the Temple period, the ram reminds us of its substitution for the sacrifice of Isaac. Jewish martyrdom and the deaths of the innocent are symbolized by the passivity of sheep.

Figure 11: *A blaze of light, or is it "the Big Bang"?*

The presence of fish in this embroidery indicates divine protection and blessing. Genesis 1:22. "And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters of the seas....'" Fish are also a symbol of redemption. The prophet Jonah is swallowed by a giant whale until he accepts God's mission. God's watchful protection is indicated by the open eyes of fish, which, like those of God, never close. The fish symbolizes fertility, good luck and luxury, and it is no wonder that the Temple Sinai tapestry includes numerous fish.

On these Torah door panels, the lion, with eyes formed in the shape of the *Magen David* ***(see figure 12),*** is an affable and protecting beast. Although many cultures and religions portray the lion as royalty, might, power and strength, for Jews the lion is the symbol of the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:9), and the Davidic kings who came from it. In biblical texts, the lion is portrayed as both destroying and punishing, and saving and protecting. The Lion of Judah, the protective lion that appears in ceremonial art on the ark and on Torah-related objects, also references spiritual strength, learning, study and scholarship. This lion is endowed with a very visible heart. and perhaps, a tear of sorrow.

The seven-branched menorah in this work is in the form of a crown. A seven-branched menorah, fueled by olive oil, was kept burning at all times in the Jerusalem Temple. It symbolized divine wisdom, the Torah being compared to light. A midrash says that Moses threw gold into a fire and the menorah formed itself. The menorah, or candelabra, is the oldest of identifiable Jewish symbols and was thus chosen as the emblem of the state of Israel.

Figure 12: *The Lion of Judah.*

Birds are frequently used to symbolize the human soul in its flight to a heavenly paradise. In Isaiah 31:5, "Like the birds that fly, even so will the Lord of Hosts shield Jerusalem," the prophet uses the image of the wings of God sheltering Israel. There are numerous fantastical, folkloric Jewish birds: the Phoenix which never dies, the *Ziz,* which blocks the sun with its enormous wingspan, the *Chol,* which lives for a thousand years before being burned in a fire to rise again from the ashes. King Solomon, to whom the early medieval collection of sayings (many biblical) in praise of nature, *Perek Shirah*, is ascribed, is thought by the rabbis to have known the language of birds, insects and animals, all of whom sang in praise of God. Peacocks, in all their glory and radiant color, as well as the more ordinary bird species, signify freedom, innocence and grace. The Temple Sinai Torah ark doors include baby birds in their nest, as a reminder of the duty to show kindness to animals.

Among the other depictions in the embroidery are simple frogs (possibly a reference to one of the Passover plagues), snails, butterflies, horses and an owl. The Peaceable Kingdom depicted here, one in which all creatures live in harmony and goodwill, reflects the optimistic tenor of the piece.

Paradise, deriving from the Persian word *pardes*, means garden or orchard in Hebrew. The idyllic garden, *Gan Eden,* from which Adam and Eve were expelled, contained the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. They tasted from the Tree of Knowledge and forfeited their ability to live forever in God's grace. This tapestry of Creation, of Eden, of paradise, is of the very few moments before that fall from grace, the seven days of innocence before making the choice between good and evil, or the forsaking of nature.

THEOLOGY OF THE TAPESTRY

BY EUGENE B. BOROWITZ

Surely, one measure of a creation's accomplishment is its power to touch people deeply, preferably in multiple ways, of which this theological reading is one. Not many a synagogue ark curtain will, like this one, omit a representation of the so-called "Tablets of the Law." Of course, the word "Torah" means "instruction" and not "law," but its core has long been understood less as narrative than as commandment. The tablets evoke not merely the Five Books of Moses but the entire Law, biblical and rabbinic. Did Marthe Clamage instinctively create her "cartoon" of the tapestry without this customary image, sensing that for her Reform congregation, it would be inappropriate? Instead, she provided a vision of Creation, not a literal pictorialization of the story told in Genesis, but a creative interpretation thereof. And it should be noted that apparently none of the people who came to work on this project ever objected to the idea that creation, rather than law, should be the dominant theme of a tapestry associated with the Temple Sinai Torah scrolls. Their faith guided them through this endeavor.

Three themes suggest themselves as the foundations for this commitment to creativity as the heart of the religious life. The first of these is social. Few American Jews can trace back four or five generations in their family history and find their forebears living as equals in their societies. After fifteen hundred years of isolation in Western civilization, modern Jews have had to create a way of being loyal to their tradition without retreating to the ghetto — and the ongoing change that characterizes Western culture has made continuing religious creativity a necessary Jewish value. Something similar can be said about religious practice. Classic Jewish Law may say, for example, that women should not be counted in a minyan, the quorum necessary for a full service, nor should their voices be heard chanting the service, nor their intelligence be applied to studying rabbinic texts, and other such indignities. Creativity in these matters and many others involves a creative reshaping of Jewish duty so that we can be freshly responsive to God as we seek new ways to live out the Covenant our people has with God since Sinai. Through the work of their hands, these Jewish women served God.

Creativity, most subtly, is a critical way we seek to imitate God. We are moved toward the new by an intuition of something which does not yet exist, and we seek to reach beyond our old selves and become what we dimly sense we now need to be. Piety for us is often sensitivity to what transcends us and which we, in the creative act, seek to make somewhat more manifest. We then do something like what God once so grandly did, and in the process realize by our action what it means to say we are created in God's image. Thus, as they stitched, turning the plain cloth into the glorious, intricate tapestry, our four artists knew, as they said, that they also were remaking themselves. As our ancestors told and retold and reshaped their religious experiences into what we have come to call the Bible and rabbinic tradition, their creativity made a place for God among our people. Today, as the tapestry of Creation now opens to expose us to the Temple Sinai Torah scrolls, it surely beckons us to the creative task of opening ourselves up to what our tradition is saying to us today.

ABOUT THE CREATORS

From left to right: Lucille Janis Weener, Veronica Roth, Phyllis Peckar Clamage, and Florence Faerman Suerig.

PHYLLIS PECKAR CLAMAGE

When Phyllis Peckar Clamage was young, she told her mother of her desire to be an artist, and have a family as well. Her mother told her, "You can't have it all. But you can have one part first and then later the other part." Through working on the ark tapestry, Phyllis discovered that her mother was right after all.

Before starting to work on the tapestry, Phyllis was so busy with her first husband, George Peckar, and her four children, that she had trouble finding time for her artistic life. Her only workspace was the family dining-room table. Then Lucille Janis invited her to work on the tapestry, and suddenly Phyllis found she could find time to participate. "I realized that if I could spend so much time on this project, then I could also follow my dream of being an artist with a complete studio of my own, instead of a dining-room table," she says.

After the dedication of the Torah tapestry, Phyllis rented a small studio space in Westport, Connecticut, where she worked four days a week while her children were in school. It was a happy, creative time when she learned to balance art with domestic responsibilities.

Phyllis's marriage of 27 years ended in 1980; her friend Marthe Clamage — who drew the original cartoon for the

tapestry — died three years later, leaving a grieving husband, Allan. Two years later, happiness came from sadness when Phyllis and Allan married, and they now enjoy seven children, fourteen grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Phyllis' work has been shown in many galleries, and she has had many one-person shows of her paintings, prints, books and paper constructions, both here and abroad. She has taught papermaking and artists' journals at the American Craft Center, the New York Botanical Gardens, various colleges and other institutions. She lives in Stamford with a large studio, "where I continue to explore a whole new series of projects, including large hangings of handmade prints on silk and Japanese paper."

She notes, "The pride I feel when I look at the Torah tapestry is my reward for being a member of a team of women who, at an important time of their lives, brought together the desire and commitment to doing something lovingly for the temple, and made the time to do it. Today, I don't know if that could happen again. Hundreds of years ago, it was common for groups of anonymous artisans to put aside their daily responsibilities to work on a project that was more important, more beautiful, more lasting than any one of them could do individually. A hundred years from now, no one will remember the names of those who worked on this Torah tapestry but I believe the tapestry itself will remain as a lasting testimony to our loving stitching and ripping."

VERONICA ROTH

Veronica Roth was born in Budapest, Hungary in 1935 as an only child and only grandchild of both sets of grandparents. Her devout maternal grandfather would say prayers three times a day, taught Veronica from the Torah daily and took her with him to worship at the Dohanyi Synagogue where she loved listening to the services.

Her father's family came from the countryside, where traditional folk art was bountiful. Her mother was a graduate of a high school dedicated to the studies of fine crafts. Hungarian folk tradition permeated their home. Veronica often would sit at her grandmother's feet as they both crocheted rugs from strips of rags. Courses in fine embroidery were obligatory in schools, for children as young as second- or third-graders. She remembers those times as happy and idyllic.

By 1943, Jews in Hungary were forced to wear yellow stars. When Veronica was nine, her father was sent to a labor camp, and her mother was deported to Bergen-Belsen, the notorious concentration camp. Eventually both her parents died in concentration camps. She was left in the care of her two grandfathers and her beloved grandmother. Shortly before the liberation of Budapest by the Russians, they were forced to move into a ghetto. Food was scarce; they were starving. Both she and her grandfather contracted dysentery. Finally, freedom came and the small family was able to return home.

Upon their return, her pious maternal grandfather died in his sleep, weakened by starvation. The city was still under siege, so it was not possible to inter him in the Orthodox cemetery on the outskirts of town. The burial took place in a hastily-dug grave in an empty lot across from their house.

"When I was working on the ark curtain, I had a dream. I saw a simple coffin covered in the beautifully handwoven white fabric of the tapestry. It became clear to me why I was doing this work. I had to do this piece, and dedicate it with great respect and humility to the memory of this devout man and to all those innocent, good people who perished during the Holocaust. It is a memorial forged with love and hope, with praise to God, the Creator of all that is beautiful and good," says Veronica.

Left to right: Florence Faerman Suerig, Lucille Janis Weener, Veronica Roth and Phyllis Peckar Clamage gaze at the partially-finished tapestry after it was attached to the panels.

After the war, life was different. The Communists cherished young people. Veronica received a scholarship to the University of Sciences. Her husband-to-be, George Roth, studied engineering. In 1956, the Russian tanks came into Budapest. During the Hungarian uprising that year, many people perished fighting to regain their freedom.The couple married in December of that year and, with Veronica's grandmother's blessing, escaped from behind the Iron Curtain to join relatives in the United States.Under a special act of Congress, the Roths boarded a United States Navy ship, *General Nelson M. Walker*. After eleven days on stormy February seas, they entered New York Harbor, to be greeted by the glorious sight of Lady Liberty. Her family brought them to Stamford, Connecticut, where they still live.

The Roths have three grown children, a son and two daughters. They are also the very proud grandparents of five grandchildren.

Veronica, who works as an artist, has exhibited and taught her craft for many years. Her most cherished occupations were working with disabled people in art classes, and also as a volunteer for Acute Rehabilitation at Stamford Hospital. For many years, with her late friend Judy Levy, Veronica designed and marketed garments of wearable art.

She says, "Through God's grace and hard work, today we are comfortable. There is truly no pride in my achievement, or myself. Whatever I do is dedicated to Him, Who has created the heavens and the earth. Life itself is a magnificent tapestry woven by the divine hand in contrasts of light and dark. The story of my life is but a tiny segment woven into the tapestry of life. I am thankful."

FLORENCE FAERMAN SUERIG

From her early teens, Florence has had a romance with fabric. Using patterns and cutting original printed patterns for clothing were ways to satisfy her desire to be in the "material world." As time passed, school, marriage and children took over. Then, after auditing a class for weaving clothing from the loom, she decided to learn to weave. During her first time seated at the loom, she had her only *déjà vu* experience. "The loom was a familiar place, and I knew I had sat at a loom before," she says. Her spiritual experience was with master weaver Klara Cheropov. When it was decided that the Torah tapestry should have a hand-woven fabric, Florence suggested Cheropov for the job.

Thus began a special five years, a truly spiritual experience and the beginning of friendships that would last a lifetime.

"Although I am not a religious woman, I feel a spiritual connection when I see, or think of the Torah curtain that I was a part of. Looking at it many years later, it is almost impossible to pick out the parts each of us stitched individually, It was a truly communal experience, and a real joy," says Florence.

Florence became an interior designer, a career that led her into building construction and ultimately back to her original love, fiber. Her love for textiles and the tactile world has led her to weave couturier garments, then tapestries, and on to abstract wall quilts. More recently, she has been working with clay and using fiber in the form of paper clay to sculpt.

With her second husband, Karl Suerig, Florence began the Red Ribbon Foundation, an AIDS organization which has successfully raised and distributed over one million dollars in the past twelve years. This seemed a natural and necessary task after the death of her son, Michael Faerman. Florence and Karl have five children and fourteen grandchildren between them. The couple resides in Greenwich. "It's close enough to visit Temple Sinai as often as we like, and marvel at the beauty of the tapestry," says Florence.

LUCILLE JANIS WEENER

Lucille Janis Weener was the instigator of the tapestry project. The mother of four children and a Temple Sinai congregant, she was thirty-five when she looked at what she termed the "shower curtain" that served as the ark covering, and thought the Torah cried out for something more spiritual and exalting.

Lucille had already been doing years-long needlepoint, crocheting and knitting projects, so she wasn't daunted by the extent of the project. She had learned how to wield a needle at school and from her mother, who came from Russia. "My mother was always embroidering something; it was her way to relax. I came to enjoy it, too," recalls Lucille.

Bird in flight: one of the many magnificent details from the tapestry.

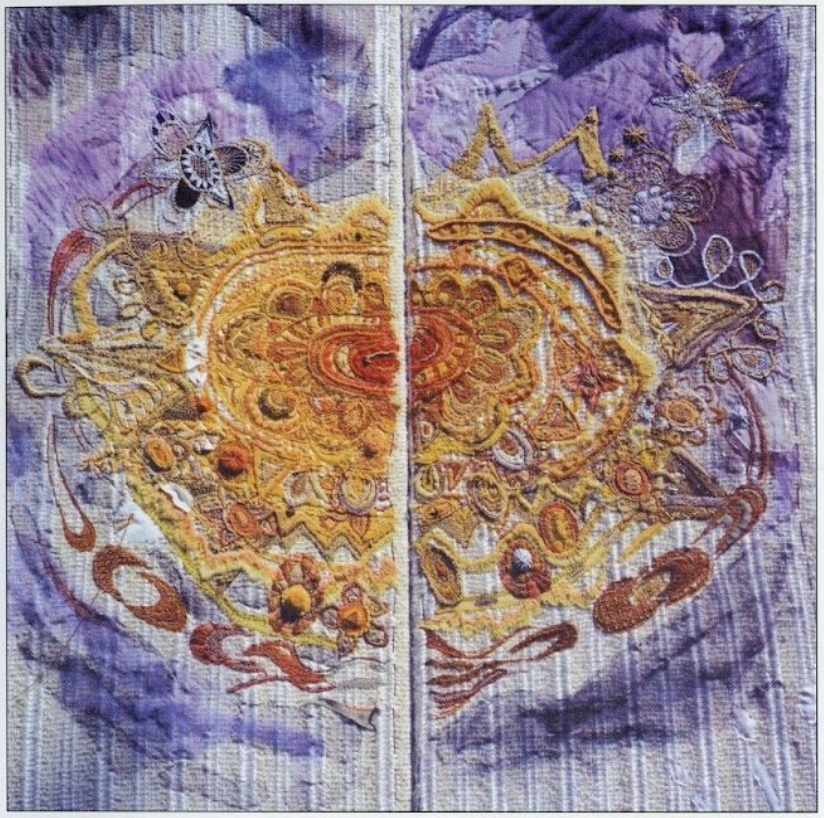
When Lucille's proposal was met initially with pessimism about whether the women could finish what looked to be about ten years' worth of work, she simply answered, "Doesn't sound impossible. Let's get going." Seven years later, she was proud to see her son, Gordon, become a bar mitzvah in front of the tapestry. "The tapestry taught me that if you have a goal and stay with it, it can be reached," she says.

Life changed drastically for Lucille when her husband, Howard Janis, died in 1976. She went to work for IBM and, in 1980, moved to Washington, DC. In 1985, she married Sumner Weener. Currently, she is involved in the opening of the Newseum, a museum dedicated to the history of news. (It will open in 2007 in Washington, DC.) She also is a volunteer docent for the Kennedy Center, and is making quilts for her four grandchildren.

She recalls her pleasure when her young granddaughters traveled from Washington, DC to Stamford to see the temple where their mother was a bat mitzvah. And they so enjoyed seeing "Grandma's curtain."

Lucille's only grandson, who is ten, lives in a small town in France where there are very few Jews. For his Jewish education, he must travel to a nearby town. When he last came to the United States, he visited Temple Sinai. There, he saw the tree planted in his grandfather's memory, and the tapestry to which his grandmother had devoted herself. "His amazed and awed reaction were my payoff for five years of stitching," she says.

Lucille currently lives in Virginia, not far from her daughter, Pam, who also put a stitch or two into the tapestry.



In Genesis, light was created on the first day; it also emerged first during the creation of the tapestry.

MARTHE CLAMAGE

Marthe Clamage created the original cartoon for the tapestry's design. An art teacher, Marthe also was a sculptor and painter whose work won numerous awards and was displayed in many galleries. Her bronze portraits of several American presidents are installed in various buildings in Washington, DC Marthe passed away in 1983.

IDA JANIS

Ida Janis, mother of Lucille's late husband Howard, was very artistic and could render exact copies of well-known paintings. Lucille remembers Ida as a good mother-in-law and friend. Ida enjoyed both the close work of the tapestry and the friendships that came with it. She passed away in 1993.

THE TEMPLE SINAI ARK TAPESTRY

A Masterwork of American Jewish Folk Art

Temple Sinai · Stamford, Connecticut

ISBN 1-4276-0165-8

9 781427 601650 90000